DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 245 551 FL 014 399

AUTHOR Fayer, Joan M.; Krasinski, Emily
TITLE Measuring Student Attitudes for Curriculum Planning: A Study of ESL Students at the University of Puerto Rico.
PUB DATE Mar 84
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (18th, Houston, TX, March 6-11, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; *Curriculum Development; Educational Assessment; *English (Second Language); Higher Education; *Language Attitudes; *Learning Motivation; *Second Language Instruction; Self Evaluation (Individuals); *Student Attitudes; Universities
IDENTIFIERS University of Puerto Rico

ABSTRACT

In 1982-83 a formative evaluation of the second-year English as a second language program at the University of Puerto Rico was conducted to examine whether the current curriculum was meeting the English language needs of the students. The instrument used was a questionnaire in Spanish to measure the students' self-assessed proficiency in English, motivations and attitudes toward the language, and current and projected uses of English. It was completed by 864 students enrolled in low-intermediate skills-oriented classes. Half the students reported good reading comprehension. While 81% stated that they liked English, 77% felt their attitudes had improved since elementary school. Although English is required in Puerto Rico, and students see it as important because of Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States, they felt that the language had been forced on them. However, they did not feel English skills had any negative effect on their Spanish. Half admitted apprehension in speaking English. The skill most immediately sought was reading, but speaking was the skill felt to be most needed in the future. The greatest need for improvement was also in reading skills. Most planned to take an English elective course in the future, especially if it were a conversational course. More than a third preferred an English requirement longer than the current two years. Other motivational and activity findings are reported and related to curriculum planning. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED245551

Measuring Student Attitudes for Curriculum Planning: A Study of ESL Students at the University of Puerto Rico

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Joan M. Fayer
Emily Krasinski

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Joan M. Fayer
Emily Krasinski
University of Puerto Rico

FL014399

Department of English
College of Humanities
University of Puerto Rico
Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico 00931

1984

Measuring Student Attitudes for Curriculum Planning

ESL student populations change as does the world in which they will be using English. Curricula that are a part of traditional college programs may tend to be resistant to change. In discussing the content of a language syllabus, Corder (1973:147) states, "we do not wish to teach the 'whole' of a language, even if we had a description of it which we don't ... out of whatever description (we have) ... a selection must be made." Although teacher identification of students' needs, motivations, etc. must be part of curriculum planning, it is felt that student input concerning their self-assessed language needs, motivation and attitudes is also essential. Recent research in second language learning indicates that affective variables such as attitudes should be analyzed when second language acquisition is being analyzed (Kleinmann 1977, Krashen 1977). Curriculum must be evaluated to determine if the needs of the students are being met and to incorporate advances in language acquisition theory, methods and materials.

In 1982-3 a formative evaluation of the second year English Program at the University of Puerto Rico was conducted in order to examine whether the current curriculum was meeting the English Language needs of the students. The instrument devised was a questionnaire in Spanish which measured the students' self assessed proficiency in English, motivations and attitudes toward the language as well as the students' current and projected future uses of English. The questionnaire which was a revised and expanded version of one used in a pilot study was completed by 864 students enrolled in low intermediate skills orientated classes.

Students in Puerto Rico study English for one class period a day from first grade to twelfth. At the University of Puerto Rico they must take two years of English. In spite of this, many students recognize that they aren't

functional in English. Puerto Rico's political association with the United States began after the Spanish American War in 1898. It now has commonwealth status and elects its own governor. Spanish is the dominate language for the majority of the population, but there are functions for English in business, industry, tourism, etc. A large percentage of the population has some degree of bilingualism.

The attitude studies that had been done in Puerto Rico generally found that students had positive attitudes toward English. However, because of the different designs of the questionnaires and the different student populations, it was difficult to compare the results. To obtain the information that was needed to revise the curriculum of a particular group of students, it was necessary to obtain the information directly from the students.

The students' self rating of their speaking, aural comprehension, writing and reading in English is summarized in Table 1. If the two highest ratings (4 and 5) are combined, half of the students feel that their reading comprehension is good. However, only 12% felt that they were fluent speakers.

Table 1

Question #26. On a scale of one to five (from worse to better) how would you evaluate your fluency in speaking English?
Question #27. How would you evaluate your comprehension of spoken English?
Question #28. How would you evaluate your written English?
Question #29. How would you evaluate your comprehension of written English?

		#26 Fluency	#27 Oral Comprehension	#28 Writing	#29 Reading Comprehension
Worse	1	8.7	4.5	5.3	2.9
	2	25.8	17.0	23.1	15.2
	3	53.1	42.0	40.7	32.1
	4	10.7	28.4	26.8	39.0
Better	5	1.7	8.4	4.1	10.8

Table 2 summarizes three attitude questions. Eighty one per cent of the students stated that they like English. There were 77% who felt that their attitudes have improved since elementary school. A larger percentage, 88%, did not feel that their attitudes have become worse. This may be explained by the fact that the students believe that the quality of English instruction improved from elementary school to the university. Another explanation may be that young children in Puerto Rico do not have many uses for English outside the English classroom. As they grow older, they become more a part of a community in which there are more functions for English.

Table 2

Question #51. I like English.
Question #52. My attitude towards English has improved since my childhood.
Question #55. My attitude towards English has become worse since my childhood.

	#51 Like	#52 Better	#55 Worse
Complete agreement	35.8	34.9	4.1
Agreement	45.2	42.9	7.4
Not in agreement	16.4	18.0	22.7
Total disagreement	2.5	4.7	65.8

The summary in Table 3 indicates that students see the usefulness of English apart from any feeling they have about the political status of Puerto Rico. They stated that it is necessary to learn English because of the political relationship of Puerto Rico to the United States. It is true that they have had no choice about studying English. However, they recognize that English is a world language. Contrary to statements that are often made, the students in this study did not feel that English had a negative effect on their Spanish.

Table 3

Question #58. It is necessary to learn English due to our relationship with the United States.
Question #53. English has been forced on us due to our political status.
Question #54. In the world today it is necessary to know English.
Question #56. I feel that learning English has negatively affected my mother tongue.

	#58 Relation with U. S.	#53 Political Status	#54 World Use	#56 Neg. effect on Sp.
Agreement	57.6	60.6	94.2	9.7
Not in agreement	42.5	39.4	5.3	90.2

Table 4 correlates feelings about English and political status with the self-assessed fluency levels of the students. Levels 1 and 2 are the lowest fluency levels and levels 4 and 5 are the highest. The majority of all the students agree that English has been forced on them. The fluent speakers (the 4's and 5's) agree even more strongly (56%). They see the political situation as a reality that hasn't effected their acquisition of English.

Table 4

Question #35. English has been forced on us due to our political status.

	1, 2	3	4, 5
Total agreement	31.4	28.4	37.5
Agreement	35.4	33.1	18.8
Not in agreement	25.7	28.7	31.3
Total disagreement	7.4	9.8	12.5

Students reported that although they are not overjoyed about learning English, they are not bothered by it. They see the need for English and are probably being frank about their feelings. Table 5 below summarizes these feelings. The responses were on a four point scale which have been combined into positive and negative.

Table 5

Question #59. I am happy that I have been required to learn English.
Question #57. I am bothered by the fact that I had to learn English.

	#59 Happy	#57 Bothered
Positive	60.3	11.4
Negative	39.7	88.6

Table 6 summarizes which people the students felt have motivated them to learn English. In the first column men and women are combined. The ranking is family, teachers, friends, and boy/girl friends, spouses. When men and women are tabulated separately, women are found to be influenced more by family and men to be influenced almost equally by teachers and family.

Table 6

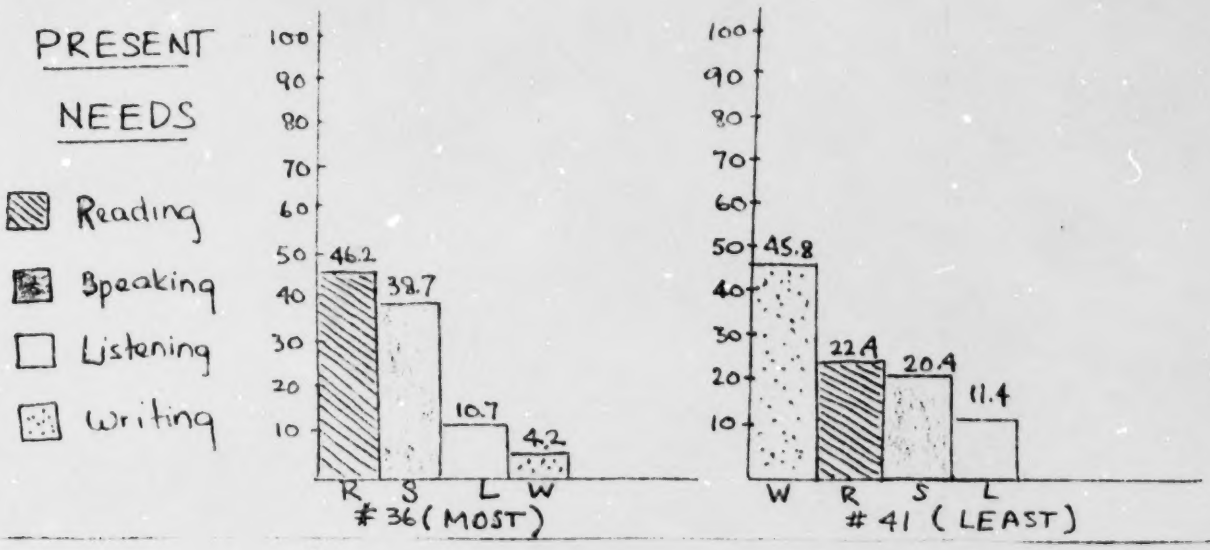
Question #35. Which person(s) have most motivated you to study English?

	Men & women	Men	Women
Family	41.3	35.9	46.7
Teachers	32.7	37.0	28.4
Friends	20.3	21.7	19.0
Boy/girl friends, spouse	5.7	5.4	5.9

A generalized question about communication apprehension was asked. Fifty per cent of the students stated that they were very nervous when they spoke English: 10% said they were paralyzed. More extensive studies (Fayer et al, 1982; McCroskey et al, 1983) found that Puerto Rican students had very high levels of communication apprehension when they speak English. Part of the explanation for this fear of speaking English is the students' self-assessed speaking skills. Only 12% felt that they were fluent speakers (Table 1). Current research indicates that other factors also contribute to this high level of communication apprehension.

A series of questions was asked concerning self-assessed student needs. (Figure 1). The corresponding question to the left graph was: "At present what I most need English for is:" and the choice of responses were: reading, speaking, listening or writing (listening referred to extended listening requiring no speech response, such as lectures, conference, films, etc.) The corresponding question to the graph on the right asked, "At present what I least need English for is," with the possible responses: reading, speaking, listening, or writing.

Figure 1.

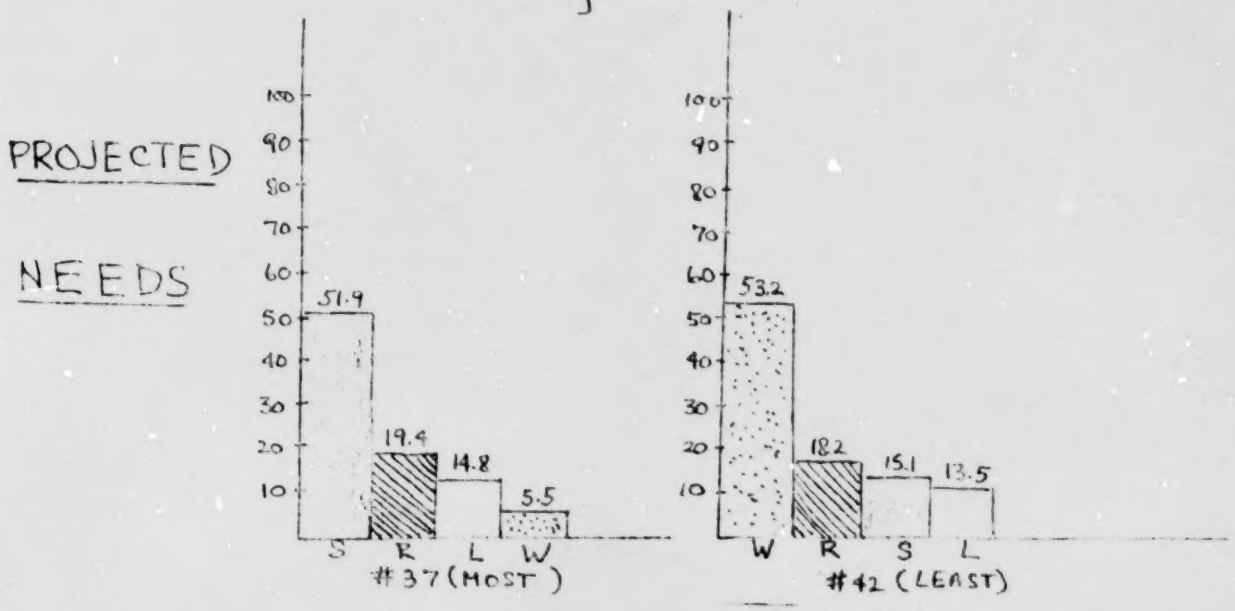


As can be seen, the skill that the largest percentage of students felt they most need at present is reading; 46.2% put this is first place. This is not too surprising as many students have textbooks in English. What is surprising is the relatively high percentage of students that put speaking in first place (38.7%). It might be questioned where they do all this speaking in English. Unfortunately this wasn't asked. This response is consistent

across fluency levels. The skill the students least need at present is writing (11.4%) and this response is also consistent across fluency levels.

Figure 2 corresponds to the questions, "After completing my university studies, I believe I will most need English for:" and "After completing my university studies I believe I will least need English for:" with the same possible responses as Figure 1.

Figure 2

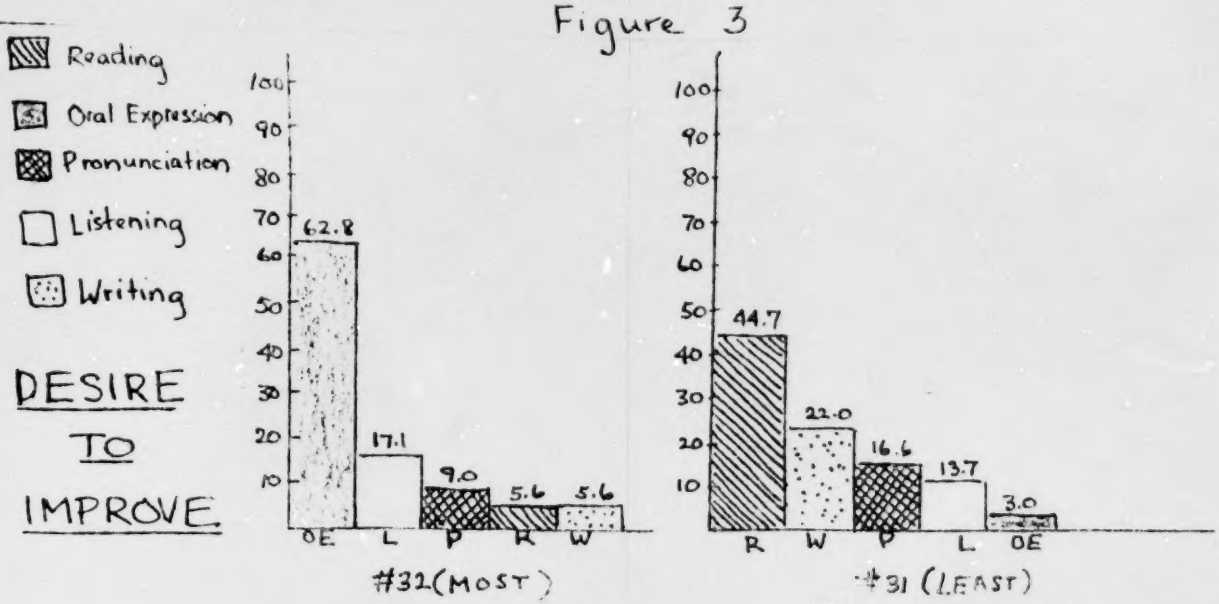


In answer to what they think they will most need in the future (Figure 2, left graph), speaking was the overwhelming choice (51.9%). In the right graph we see that over half (53.2%) indicated they would least need writing. It seems they do not have to do much writing in English now, nor do they expect to in the future. When these questions were broken down across fluency levels, speaking was consistently in first place.

Students were also asked what aspect of their English they wished to improve. The possible responses are listed in Figure 3 on the left: reading, oral expression, pronunciation, listening, and writing (Pronunciation was

added because it is a component of speaking that can be worked on independently). In the left graph, oral expression is by far the overwhelming choice, with 62.8%. Reading and writing together got the least number of first choice responses: only 5.6% each. This pattern is also generally found across fluency levels.

Figure 3



When asked what they thought they least needed to improve (Figure 3, right graph), reading got the highest rating (44.7%). This may or may not imply that they feel sufficiently confident with reading and writing; on looking back at their self-rating, in Table 1, it can be seen that most students evaluated their reading toward the higher part of the scale --much higher than their self-evaluation of their writing. However, their responses to these questions can be interpreted as indicating their priorities. In comparing what they desire to improve with their present and future needs we can see that writing has a very low priority: outside of the English class, they did not need to write much in English at the University, they felt they will least need it in the future, and it has a low priority as a

as a skill they wish to improve. This reflects their changing world; it seems that letter writing, for example has taken second place to long-distance phone calls. On the other hand, the ability to speak, is given a high priority both in terms of future needs and in terms of desire to improve, even though our students presently need to read English more than to speak it.

The students' desire, to improve their speaking ability is again reflected in Table 7. In one question, "do you plan to take an English elective in the future," 55.3% indicated YES. However, when the question was changed to ask if they would take an additional course in conversational English, 85.5% said YES.

Table 7

	Yes	No
Question #39 Do you plan to take an elective in English in the future?	55.3	44.7
Question #40 If there were an additional course in conversational English would you take it?	85.5	14.5

The break down according to students' fluency in Table 8 indicates that those who are more fluent (4's and 5's) are more likely to want an English elective in the future (64.6%). Since existing electives have been content courses in literature, speech, and linguistics where competency in English is necessary, it is not surprising that the more fluent speakers would be more likely to take them. However, over 80% of all fluency levels would choose an additional conversational course if it were offered.

Table 8

	YES		
	1, 2	3	4, 5
Question #39			
Do you plan to take an elective in English in the future?	52.9	54.9	64.6
Question #40			
If there were an additional course in conversational English would you take it?	83.6	86.7	83.0

The same pattern holds true over all the self-assessed skills: approximately 50% of all levels of comprehension, reading and writing would consider taking an elective, while over 80% would if it were a conversational course.

A question was also asked concerning the English requirement (Table 9). At present English is a 2-year requirement. Though most students preferred the status quo (40.7%), almost as many students (36.7%) indicated that it should be more than a two year requirement. Why should so many students prefer English to be required when it can be taken as an elective? Apparently, either they want the decision out of their hands or they feel it should be general policy, indicating the importance they give English. Very few wanted less than 2 years.

Table 9

Question #43. In the university English should be ...

	#43
One year requirement	12.0
Two year requirement	40.9
More than two year requirement	36.7
An elective	10.4

Another finding concerned certain class activities. The students were asked to choose which activities they would most like to practice in an

oral English class, which activities they would choose second, and which they would choose last. Table 10 indicates that first choice for 75.5% of the students was social conversation, second choice for 43.8% was work situations, and last for 47.9% was shopping. This could mean that the so-called survival skills, such as skills needed for shopping or traveling, are not as relevant to most of our students in Puerto Rico as they might be to English students on the mainland. They want to be able to carry on a conversation, presumably with a native speaker of English.

Table 10

Question #44. Of the following activities, choose what you would most want to learn in a class of oral English:
Question #45. What would you choose second?
Question #46. What would you choose last?

	#44 First	#45 Second	#46 Last
Language used:			
In shopping	.5	2.5	47.9
Social conversation	75.5	17.5	2.5
Public speaking	7.3	26.4	16.7
In work situations	14.2	43.8	11.1
In traveling	2.5	9.7	21.7

The second highest ranking priority was "work" situations. They want to be able to use the language related to their jobs. It is very difficult to predict, however, what type of work situations these students will find themselves in in the future. Even if it were assumed that they will require English related to their major, there is a large variety of majors among our students (a survey indicated 65 different majors).

The students were also asked what factor most motivated them to learn English. As can be seen from Table 11, the highest ranking motivating factor

for 30.7% of the students was career success. In second place came the ability to converse with English speakers and cultural reasons (the difference between the two is not significant). In third place came travel or study in the U.S. and last came a good grade. When asked what motivated them least the opposite is true. If we can believe them, most of our students have more powerful reasons for studying English than the grade.

Table 11

Question #33. Which of the following factors has most motivated you to study English?
Question #34. Which of the following factors has least motivated you?

	#33 Most	#34 Least
To converse with English speakers	25.1	10.8
Career success	30.7	4.3
Cultural reasons	24.3	12.9
Travel or study in the U. S.	13.4	28.6
To get a good grade in English	6.5	43.3

Where does all this information lead us as far as curriculum planning is concerned? First of all, it was discovered that most of our students do have a positive attitude toward English, which is half the battle won. This positive attitude must be taken advantage of by providing students with what they want. Their highest priority is the development of speaking skills in spite of the fact that they currently need to do more reading that speaking, and, as was indicated, they felt that their reading skills were not too bad.

We are currently revising our whole curriculum in light of these results. Whereas before there was one second-year course entitled "Readings in Contemporary Themes," this is being replaced by a four-level course with emphasis on listening and speaking; reading and writing will be used to aid the development of these skills.

Whereas before we had no higher level conversational course available to the students besides content courses requiring a great deal of competence in comprehension, note-taking and writing, but very little opportunity to develop speaking fluency, two upper level conversational courses are being added to the curriculum. As a result of consultations with the College of Natural Sciences, an ESP course for science majors has been added. We have also included an English course for majors in public communication. These students speak on the radio, on television, write news releases and publish a book on oral history.

In conclusion, it is our view that students' attitudes, needs, and motivations, as reported by the students themselves, in addition to evaluating their needs by other methods, are important in assessing whether a curriculum is actually meeting their present as well as long-range English language needs.

References

Agheyisi, Rebecca and Joshua A. Fishman. 1970. "Language Attitude Studies: A Brief Survey of Methodological Approaches." Anthropological Linguistics, 12:137-157.

Arus de Figueroa, Aida E. 1970. "Study on the Relationship Between Achievement in English of Students of the Ana Roque High School in Humacao and Their Attitudes Toward the English Language and the Continental Community." M. A. Thesis. University of Puerto Rico.

Bonilla de Muñoz, Gladys, and Sandra Ortíz Batis. 1972. "Attitudes Toward English in Puerto Rico." M. A. Thesis. University of Puerto Rico.

Corder, Pitt. 1973. Introducing Applied Linguistics. Harmondsworth: Penguin Education.

Díaz, José Padilla. 1971. "Estudio sobre la actitud de un grupo de estudiantes de la escuela secundaria pública hacia el aprendizaje del idioma inglés." M. A. Thesis. University of Puerto Rico.

Fayer, Joan M., James. C. McCroskey, and Virginia P. Richmond. 1982. "Communication Apprehension in Puerto Rico and the United States." Speech Communication Association of Puerto Rico Convention, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Kleinmann, H. 1977. "Avoidance Behavior in Adult Second Language Acquisition." Language Learning, 27:93-107.

Krashen, Stephen. 1977. "The Monitor Model of Adult Second Language Performance." In M. Burt, H. Dulay, and M. Finocchiaro, eds. Viewpoints on English as a Second Language. New York: Regents, 152-61.

Llado-Berrios, Nitza. 1978. English as a Second Language in Puerto Rico: A Language Attitude Study and Its Pedagogical Implications. Ph. D. Diss.

McCroskey, James C., Joan M. Fayer, and Virginia P. Richmond. 1983. "Don't Speak to Me in English: Communication Apprehension in Puerto Rico." Speech Communication Association of Puerto Rico Convention, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Olmeda Burgos, María Esther. 1973. "Attitudes Toward English and the English Class." M. A. Thesis. University of Puerto Rico.

Príncipe Galarza, Jorge O. 1973. "Attitude Toward the English Language." M. A. Thesis. University of Puerto Rico.